

"Lift up your eyes upon  
This day breaking for you.  
Give birth again  
To the dream."

—MAYA ANGELOU

# 'The Horizon Leans Forward'

The inaugural poem written and delivered  
by Maya Angelou:

**A** Rock, A River, A Tree  
Hosts to species long since departed,  
Marked the mastodon.  
The dinosaur, who left dry tokens  
Of their sojourn here  
On our planet floor,  
Any broad alarm of their hastening doom  
Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.

But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,  
Come, you may stand upon my  
Back and face your distant destiny,  
But seek no haven in my shadow.  
I will give you no hiding place down here.

You, created only a little lower than  
The angels, have crouched too long in  
The bruising darkness,  
Have lain too long  
Face down in ignorance.  
Your mouths spilling words

Armed for slaughter.  
The Rock cries out to us today, you may stand on me  
But do not hide your face.

Across the wall of the world,  
A River sings a beautiful song,  
It says, come rest here by my side.

Each of you a bordered country,  
Delicate and strangely made proud,  
Yet thrusting perpetually under siege.  
Your armed struggles for profit  
Have left collars of waste upon  
My shore, currents of debris upon my breast.  
Yet, today I call you to my riverside,  
If you will study war no more. Come,  
Clad in peace and I will sing the songs  
The Creator gave to me when I and the  
Tree and the Rock were one.  
Before cynicism was a bloody sear across your  
Brow and when you yet knew you still  
Knew nothing.

The River sings and sings on:

There is a true yearning to respond to

The singing River and the wise Rock.  
So say the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew  
The African, the Native American, the Sioux,  
The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek  
The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheikh,  
The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,  
The privileged, the homeless, the Teacher.  
They all hear  
The speaking of the Tree.

They hear the first and last of every Tree  
Speak to humankind today. Come to me, here beside the  
River.

Plant yourself beside me, here beside the River.

Each of you, descendant of some passed  
On traveller, has been paid for.  
You, who gave me my first name, you  
Pawnee, Apache, Seneca, you  
Cherokee Nation, who rested with me, then  
Forced on bloody feet, left me to the employment of  
Other seekers—desperate for gain,  
Starving for gold.

You, the Turk, the Arab, the Swede, the German, the  
Eskimo, the Scot,

You the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Kru, bought  
Sold, stolen, arriving on a nightmare  
Praying for a dream.

Here, root yourselves beside me.  
I am that Tree planted by the River,  
Which will not be moved.

I, the Rock, I the River, I the Tree  
I am yours—your Passages have been paid.  
Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need  
For this bright morning dawning for you.  
History, despite its wrenching pain,  
Cannot be unlived, but if faced  
With courage, need not be lived again.

Lift up your eyes upon  
This day breaking for you.  
Give birth again  
To the dream.

Women, children, men,  
Take it into the palms of your hands.  
Mold it into the shape of your most  
Private need. Sculpt it into  
The image of your most public self.  
Lift up your hearts  
Each new hour holds new chances  
For new beginnings.  
Do not be wedded forever  
To fear, yoked eternally  
To brutishness.

The horizon leans forward,  
Offering you space to place new steps of change.  
Here, on the pulse of this fine day  
You may have the courage  
To look up and out and upon me, the  
Rock, the River, the Tree, your country.  
No less to Midas than the mendicant.  
No less to you now than the mastodon then.

Here on the pulse of this new day  
You may have the grace to look up and out  
And into your sister's eyes, and into  
Your brother's face, your country  
And say simply  
Very simply  
With hope  
Good morning.

the poet:  
steps up to embrace poet Maya Angelou  
and as Vice President Gore watches.